

**Canada's Immigration Policy Changes and Impact on International Student with
Families**

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of Canada's 2024 immigration policies on international postgraduate students with families, analyzing policy documents, institutional responses, and student experiences. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and autoethnography, the research examines how immigration policies construct international students' identities, the economic and exclusionary justifications behind policy decisions, and the broader implications for student well-being. The findings indicate that policy narratives primarily frame international students as economic contributors rather than as individuals with academic, social, and familial needs. The exclusionary language used in policy discussions reinforces barriers to permanent residency, work opportunities, and family sponsorship, making it increasingly difficult for international students with dependents to thrive in Canada. The study further highlights how universities, particularly Thompson Rivers University (TRU), respond to these challenges, often focusing on financial mitigation rather than direct student support. Drawing on Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care, this research advocates for policy reforms that prioritize the holistic well-being of international students and their families, proposing a care-based framework for immigration policy design. The study concludes that without intentional reforms, Canada risks diminishing its reputation as a desirable educational destination and creating unnecessary hardship for the very students it seeks to attract.

Keywords: International students, Immigration policy, Family sponsorship, Canada, Higher education, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ethics of Care, Economic migration, Student well-being

Dedication

This project is dedicated to all international students who find themselves navigating the complexities and uncertainties of ever-evolving immigration policies.

Your resilience, courage, and unwavering pursuit of education in the face of systemic challenges inspire this work. May your stories continue to be heard, your needs acknowledged, and your journeys honored.

This is for you.

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This journey has been one of both personal and academic transformation, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who helped make it possible.

Chapter One

1.0 Introduction

I embarked on a journey that carries not just a shift in geography but also a leap of faith, driven by the longing for professional growth and personal fulfillment. My story begins with aspirations formed during a brief academic visit to the U.S. The supportive environment I encountered there contrasted sharply with the difficult working conditions in my home country, compelling me to look beyond borders for a better life.

With Canada offering a reputation for safety, stability, and inclusivity, my journey took shape in 2022. However, the reality proved far more complex than expected—immigration policies shifted frequently, financial pressures mounted, and the road to personal growth often felt tangled with bureaucratic hurdles. Yet, my determination did not waver. Even when discouraged by setbacks, such as starting with a graduate certificate rather than a more advanced degree, I embraced the experience as an opportunity to transform myself, especially through a new path in education.

Through this journey, the essence of resilience emerges. Each step forward required overcoming uncertainty and adapting to changes, such as shifting work policies and immigration rules. My story is not just about academic pursuits but also about the emotional and mental strength needed to thrive amid unpredictability. It highlights the importance of learning, not just for career development but to understand oneself and one's role in a global landscape. My story shows that being an international student is more than just academic—it's an act of courage and self-discovery, offering lessons that extend beyond the classroom.

1.1. My personal journey

My Canada journey began in 2018 when some research colleagues invited me in Michigan State University (MSU) for a visiting scholar program under a project- Alliance for African Partnership. I was the African partner for research on Climate change issues and Agriculture. My stay in MSU was only for 3 weeks but I appreciated the culture of academics in the clime. The working conditions were different from what I had access to from my home country. There was access to basic amenities that would enhance productivity as an academic, compared to my experience from back home. I wanted such conditions. I was presented with two options, Canada, and the US. The question was why Canada and not US? I read about Canada's reputation as a safe and stable country, and that reputation reflects an excellent quality of education (Chen, 2007). I also researched and found out that Canada is known to be a society that is tolerant and not discriminatory. In 2019, I applied for the Manitoba Provincial Nomination, but I did not pull through because I could not meet up with the criteria that could have qualified me for the express entry-a path to permanent residency.

I still felt dissatisfied with the conditions of work in my home country. The dissatisfaction was coupled with some political and economic constraints that were faced back home. In 2022, I was ready to take the risks and decided to pursue my dream of a better life as an academic, and the only option available for me was to come to Canada as a student. This option was available, given the commitment of the Canadian Government to increasing the number of international students studying in Canada, and the policies put into place to support this goal. In its 2014 International Education Strategy, the Government of Canada announced that it would work with the provinces and territories, Canadian educational institutions, and other stakeholders

to double the size of Canada's international student base from 239,131 in 2011 to more than 450,000 by 2022 (Government of Canada, 2014).

I had the option of continuing my pursuit as an international student in the field of my discipline-agriculture or an entirely new route-education. I decided to go with the latter. I have been teaching at post-secondary schools back in my home country without understanding the pedagogy of teaching. It was not a prerequisite at that level of teaching. I was ready to delve into this new horizon behind the mindset that I will be better exposed to teaching principles and philosophies, and be better equipped for the future as a teacher/researcher. This did not come without its challenges and fears. There were fears of the unknown for my immediate family, especially my spouse. My spouse had always been an entrepreneur in agribusiness, he had the fear of starting a firm of his dream in a strange land. My children were the direct opposite of that fear, they were excited to experience a life they had been reading about and watching on the television. I also had a fear of what would become of my past experiences and achievements in my chosen career. I applied for an annual renewable leave of absence from my institution thinking perhaps if things did not work out as planned, I can easily go back to my institution.

I carefully selected a university in a small town that offers a living that I would thrive in. When the admission came, I was offered an admission to start at the graduate certificate level. That was a bit discouraging, but it was the closest I could get as it relates to the pursuance of my dreams. However, my visa was not approved at the time of resumption, so my admission was deferred to accommodate the visa processing time. The visas and permits granted to my family and I did not cover the duration of the study of my MEd program, which meant that at some point in my program, I would need to request an extension for the permits. During the orientation process, the alumni and student associations assured the new students that there were

opportunities for international students. There were success stories of alumni who graduated and were assured of a statutory 3-year Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) at the successful completion of the program. However, stories eventually emerged about international students' refusal of the 3-year PGWP due to reasons that were not made public. The details of this will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Coming on board the program, apart from the initial academic challenges that I faced because of my launch into a new discipline I was always affected by several immigration policies. These include unstable number of hours to work as a graduate student; inability to work without a Canadian experience, and restrictions on access to grants for academic activities as an international student. The other major immigration policy that affected me was the delay in the processing of my expired study permit and the other permits of my family members. The expected processing time according to IRCC, 2024 is 107 days (latest update), this was different from what I experienced, as mine took over 160 days. This caused me and my family a lot of issues, our medical services plan (MSP) was cancelled because we were out of status, my spouse' appointment with a care home was rescinded because there was no assurance that the visas will be approved, we were all psychologically affected because we were not sure of the outcome of IRCC. At one time, I applied for a position in my university as research development officer, I had the needed qualification to fill the position, but I could not proceed with the process of recruitment because of my expired status. I have been the subject of this delayed process, which took a toll on my emotional and psychological state, and more importantly wellbeing of my family.

At one point, I was not sure of the number of hours to work following rumors of the review of the hours to work off campus. This affected my ability to meet the high tuition fees

demands as an international student. International post graduate students often rely on part-time or casual employment to supplement their living expenses (Blaj-Ward & Matic, 2020) and so changes in the number of hours to work as international students off campus is a huge concern to many. Since I arrived in Kamloops in September 2023, I have been impacted by changes in policy as regarding working hours three times. On my expired study permit, the number of hours written was 20 hours, whereas students who were admitted before me had an unlimited number of hours to work off campus. On April 24, 2024, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Honorable Marc Muller announced that international students' number of hours will be changed from 20 hours to 24 hours (IRCC, 2024). This same announcement made, directing all students to work for more than 20 hours off campus until Fall, 2024. Unfortunately, students were hit with the news that the new rule of 24 hours was yet to be approved by IRCC and there arose another round of confusion for international students. There were speculations that international students needed to provide proof of funds when applying for their visas to demonstrate their ability to cover their cost-of-living expenses. But the case became different as there had been a geometric progression on the cost of living in Canada and this happens continually, making the originally presented proof of funds, not sufficient anymore for sustainability (Emery & Levitt 2002).

The new immigration policies restrict employment opportunities for me and many other international students, making it difficult for us to support ourselves financially during our studies. This lack of employment opportunities further strained our financial situation and exposed us to housing and food insecurity and many other issues. The food bank was one of our go-to places every week to augment our food needs. Unfortunately, that was aborted when we were stopped from going weekly and it became a monthly exercise. In some ways we were

fortunate in BC as a food bank in Brampton, Ontario completely banned international students because of an “overwhelming demand” that it could not meet (CBC News, 2024).

Graduate students often seek opportunities for part-time work or paid internships to support their studies and gain practical experience. Canada's policies regarding work permits for international students can influence the students’ perceptions. Research by Scott et al. (2015), highlighted the importance of work opportunities for international students in Canada. Positive experiences with work permits can enhance their overall perception of Canada's immigration policies. Many international university students encounter discrimination and limitations in accessing resources to different immigration pathways. They encounter problems such as recruitment, support, and retention to become permanent residents (Government of Canada, 2014). One of the primary concerns for international post graduate students is the duration of their stay in Canada. Many students desire permanent residency or the opportunity to stay permanently after completing their studies, however, immigration policies often restrict or limit the length of time they can remain in the country. A recent development is the enforcement of international students to take a test of English before applying for PGWP. This uncertainty creates anxiety and stress for me and other international students, affecting our overall well-being and, sometimes, academic performance.

1.2. Canadian international students profiling

International students' enrollment at Canadian universities has increased dramatically during the past ten years, with the number of foreign students studying in Canada increasing by 119 percent between 2010 and 2017 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). At the end of 2023, there are 1,040,985 international students in Canada at all levels of study. These

students come from India (41%), the Philippines (5%), China (10%), Nigeria (4%), and Brazil (2%) to mention a few (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). Specifically, in 2015 and 2016, after considering Canadian scholarships and bursaries—the overall annual spending of foreign students, including their visiting relatives and friends, contributed \$12.8 billion and \$15.5 billion to economic activity in Canada (Kunin & Associates, 2017).

While Canada is considered an attractive destination for international students due to its favorable immigration policies in the past years, there are significant challenges tied to financial pressures, immigration uncertainty, workplace exploitation, mental health struggles, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (El-Assal, 2020). These negative implications underscore the need for continuous policy refinement to address the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by international students. According to the latest news update by IRCC, 2024, there had been recent reforms in the eligibility criteria for international students in the workforce through the Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP). The PGWP is a crucial step for international students to gain Canadian work experience, which is a requirement for PR eligibility. However, the PGWP is granted by Canadian government once and for a limited period (up to 3 years). If students cannot secure a job or gain the required experience during this time, their pathway to permanent residency is jeopardized. This can cause significant stress, especially as students race against time to meet immigration criteria. Other issues of concern as it relates to immigration uncertainty is the delay in visa processing times which often leads to mental health issues for most international students.

There was a policy that placed a limit and cap on international students' enrollment in Canadian Universities. Recent data on international students in Canada demonstrate that the Canadian Government has already achieved the international students target well before 2022. In

fact, in 2017, there were 494,525 international students in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). The increasing number of international students has had a positive impact on the Canadian economy (Kunin, 2012).

1.3. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study outline the specific aims and goals that the research intends to achieve. For the study on exploring the effects of immigration policies on international Postgraduate Students with families in Western Canadian Universities, the following objectives will be considered:

1. Examine how Canada's 2024 immigration policies construct the identity and role of international students and their families by examining the language, framing, and underlying assumptions in policy documents.
2. Explore the dominant narratives and ideologies reinforced through immigration policy discourse, assessing how international students are positioned within Canada's economic and educational framework.
3. Identify whose interests and perspectives are prioritized or marginalized in the development and implementation of these immigration policy reforms, highlighting the impact on international students with families.
4. Evaluate institutional responses, particularly those of Thompson Rivers University (TRU), to these policy changes, determining how universities adapt to or challenge the shifting immigration landscape.
5. Propose alternative policy frameworks using a care-based approach, emphasizing student well-being, inclusivity, and family stability within Canada's immigration system.

1.4. Research strategy and search

To understand international postgraduate students' perception of immigration policies, the study will employ an in-depth autoethnography of the writer being an international postgraduate student with a family. Adams et al. (2015) and Denzin (2014) provided a theoretical and practical framework for understanding and employing autoethnography. The texts described autoethnography as a qualitative research method that combines elements of autobiography and ethnography to explore cultural, social, and firsthand experiences. Researchers use their own lived experiences as the central data source, reflecting on personal narratives to analyze and understand broader cultural phenomena. This method emphasizes storytelling, reflexivity, and critical analysis, aiming to connect personal insights with larger social and cultural contexts. Adams provided a detailed introduction to autoethnography that explores complex or marginalized perspectives and is often used in fields such as education, sociology, anthropology, and performance studies. It encourages a deeply reflective process, where the researcher critically examines their positionality and the implications of their experiences within cultural frameworks. Denzin (2014), on the other hand, explored interpretive approaches to autoethnography, emphasizing the importance of critical and performative elements in the method.

The search strategy involved the use of academic and institutional databases such as TRU database – ERIC, JSTOR, Canada Immigration Refugees- IRCC PubMed, and Google Scholar to find peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and government reports. Keywords like immigration policies, international students in Canada, postgraduate education, and family integration were used. Later, a content discourse analysis (CDA) of policy documents was conducted.

1.5. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of immigration policies on international postgraduate students with families in Canada. The international student narratives will solidly amplify the voices of the concerned to drive home the points that should be heard. It aims to uncover how these policies affect their academic pursuits, social integration, and emotional well-being. The study seeks to provide actionable insights such as reforming visa policies to acknowledge family needs, ensuring work policies reflect economic realities, addressing delays in permit processing, improving institutional support for international students with families, enhancing employment and funding opportunities, and advocating for student-friendly immigration policies. These insights are for policymakers, university administrators, and stakeholders to improve support systems for this demographic.

1.6. Theoretical framework

This project is grounded in Nel Noddings' Theory of Care, emphasizing relationships, empathy, and mutual respect and in the deep classical sense—rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. A care-based approach requires much more than a feeling of caring for one another; it requires leaders to challenge the status quo. Nel Noddings (1984) opined that care ethics are present “when people genuinely care enough about another’s unjust situation to respond to it by taking corrective action” (Noddings 1984, cited by Bass, 2012, p. 76). The theory will guide the understanding of:

- How the supportive immigration policies (or lack thereof) impact the well-being of international students and their families.
- the role of institutional care in mitigating the challenges posed by immigration barriers.

Noddings' framework will help structure the discussion around caring relationships and policies that promote or hinder care in educational and immigration systems. Nel Noddings' Theory of Care is a philosophical and educational framework that emphasizes the significance of care as a fundamental ethical and relational practice. It challenges traditional moral theories that focus on principles and rules, advocating instead for an approach centered on relationships, empathy, and context-sensitive actions.

Noddings conceptualizes care as inherently relational, involving at least two parties: the caregiver (one who cares) and the cared-for (one who receives care). This relationship is reciprocal, as the cared-for acknowledges and responds to the caregiver's effort. The relationship forms the basis for ethical decision-making, emphasizing responsiveness over abstract rules. Noddings proposes an "ethical ideal" of care, rooted in human interconnectedness. She argues that our moral obligations are shaped by relationships and contexts rather than universal ethical laws. Held (2006) concurs with Noddings standpoint, asserting that care ethics makes the case that moral behavior ought to consider each person's wants and interests in addition to advancing justice and fairness).

In applying Noddings' theory, immigration policies and university systems should be evaluated based on how they foster or hinder caring relationships. For international postgraduate students and their families, care extends beyond individuals to institutions and policymakers. Universities and governments act as caregivers in this context, responsible for creating policies and environments that ensure the well-being of international students. Examples include accessible work permits, affordable healthcare, and support services that prioritize the holistic needs of students and their families. It is important to ensure that empathy is integrated into policy design. Immigration policies should reflect empathy and attentiveness to the lived realities

of students and their families. This includes considering the emotional, financial, and social pressures they face due to visa restrictions, delayed permits, and lack of access to employment or community resources.

Students, as the cared-for, must have mechanisms to communicate their needs and provide feedback. Noddings' emphasis on reciprocity highlights the importance of fostering trust and dialogue between institutions and international students.

The research project explored how immigration policies either align with or deviate from the principles of care. It will examine whether policies are crafted with attentiveness to students' challenges, such as work-hour restrictions, visa delays, and lack of institutional support. Families accompanying international students often face unique challenges, including restricted access to healthcare and employment. Noddings' theory underlines the importance of extending care to families, acknowledging their integral role in the students' academic and personal stability. The research project also investigated how universities provide a "caring" environment through support services, such as counseling, financial aid, and integration programs, and how these efforts can be improved to reflect Noddings' ideals. Noddings' Theory of Care provides a robust framework for analyzing the intersection of immigration policies, institutional practices, and the well-being of international students. It emphasizes the moral and relational obligations of caregivers (institutions and policymakers) to create empathetic, responsive, and inclusive environments for international students and their families. This perspective is crucial in crafting.

recommendations for more effective and humane immigration and educational policies.

1.7. Scope and limitations of the research project

This research project focuses on international postgraduate students in Western Canada, exploring how immigration policies intersect with their academic, social, and familial experiences. Particular attention is given to students who migrate with families, offering a perspective that enriches current discussions around international student mobility and support systems. The project does not aim for generalizability but adopts an exploratory lens, drawing insights from policy documents, institutional reports, and public discourse. A roundtable engagement with peers and academic mentors was conducted at one stage to refine the project's objectives and ensure the analysis remained grounded and critically reflective. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of emerging themes and strengthened the credibility of the interpretations.

2.0. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Context and purpose

This literature review aims to discuss issues around immigration policies and the effect on international students, particularly those with families. Canada has seen a significant rise in international student enrollment, growing from 239,131 in 2011 to over 1 million by 2023 Source. This trend reflects the nation's emphasis on attracting global talent through favorable immigration policies and high-quality education. Studies showed that the Canadian government's initiatives, such as the International Education Strategy (2014), made a commitment to doubling the international student base and strengthening the country's reputation as a welcoming destination for higher education. The narrative has shifted following the Canadian government's reversal on border policies and the introduction of a significant cap on international student enrollment. The students who are from India, China, the Philippines, and Nigeria, form a diverse and dynamic population. Despite this growth, international students encounter unique challenges, such as navigating complex immigration pathways, meeting high financial demands, and integrating into new social and academic environments. These experiences differ significantly from domestic students and underscore the need for policies and institutional support tailored to this group.

The purpose of the literature review is to explore and synthesize research on the lived experiences of international students in Canada, identifying both barriers and opportunities. This involves addressing how shifting immigration rules, such as fluctuating work-hour limits and visa delays, affect students' stability and well-being and those of their families. There are varying factors that affect many international students, and this has a major effect on the

pathways to permanent residency and the disconnect between policy promises and student realities. There are lots of struggles to balance high tuition fees, cost-of-living increases, and limited work opportunities and this has major implications for financial insecurity, academic performance, and mental health. This literature review aims to identify gaps in research, propose areas for improvement, and provide a foundation for developing better policies and practices. Understanding Canada's shifting immigration policies and their impact on international students with families is not just an academic exercise—it is a necessity for informed policymaking. If international students are expected to contribute to Canada's economy and labor market, they need policies that support their academic success, financial stability, and family well-being. Without this understanding, Canada risks losing its reputation as a leader in global education and creating unnecessary hardship for the very students it seeks to attract. It seeks to ensure that the rising international student population not only benefits Canada economically but also thrives academically, socially, and personally. The thriving will not be complete without putting the family into consideration when addressing international students' concerns.

2.2. Push and pull factors for studying abroad

Studying abroad is often influenced by a combination of push factors such as limited opportunities or unfavorable conditions in the home country and pull factors such as better education, career prospects, and immigration pathways offered by the host country. This section discusses factors that support transition from temporary residency as international students to potential permanent residency in Canada, in the context of Canadian immigration policies and their impact. King and Sondhi (2018) provided a comparative analysis of motivations for studying abroad between UK and Indian students, examining international student migration

(ISM) in the context of the global education economy. The study is based on data collected from online surveys and in-depth interviews of UK and Indian students studying internationally, highlighting differences between North-North (UK to North America, Europe, and Australia) and South-North (India to Anglophone developed countries) migration patterns. The research is based on findings from two interconnected projects, each exploring different aspects of international student mobility. The first project, *Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad*, was conducted in 2008–2009 and funded by the UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. It focused on UK students pursuing full degree programs (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral) in countries such as North America, Australia, and parts of Europe. Data collection involved two methods: an online survey with 553 respondents and 64 face-to-face interviews, primarily with students in the United States. Further methodological details can be found in Findlay and King (2010).

The second project was a doctoral study on Indian student migration (Sondhi, 2013), designed to align methodologically with the UK study for comparative purposes. Conducted in 2010–2011, it included an online questionnaire with 157 Indian students studying abroad and 43 face-to-face interviews—22 with Indian students in Canada and 21 with returnees in India. Additionally, 22 interviews were conducted in New Delhi with parents of students studying abroad. These projects together provide a comparative perspective on student migration, highlighting motivations, experiences, and parental influences on international study decisions.

One of the main findings is the similarity in primary motivations between the two groups. Both UK and Indian students emphasize the desire to attend prestigious universities, which are perceived as pathways to better career prospects and cultural experiences. For UK students, the opportunity to study abroad often complements domestic education, while Indian

students view it as a strategy to overcome local educational limitations and gain global exposure (King & Sondhi, 2018). Moreover, Indian students frequently see international education as a step toward long-term migration, reflecting the influence of India's economic growth and diasporic connections, whereas UK students often pursue it as an adventure and anticipate returning home afterward.

The study also reveals subtle variations, such as UK students' concerns over rising domestic tuition fees and limited course availability, which drive them to explore overseas options. Indian students, in contrast, are more influenced by family encouragement and the global reputation of universities, often aiming for fields like STEM or business, which align with India's labor market demands (King & Sondhi, 2018). The research concludes that ISM is not merely an individual choice but is shaped by structural factors, including economic opportunities and the socio-cultural aspirations of families. ISM's framing within global North-South dynamics also underscores how students from emerging economies like India navigate education and labor markets differently from their UK counterparts, whose ISM decisions are less constrained by structural limitations in their home country (King & Sondhi, 2018).

A similar work by Jing et al. (2021) examines the motivations behind Chinese students' decision to pursue post-secondary education in Canada, utilizing the push-pull model as a framework. Through interviews with 20 Chinese secondary students and four parents, the study identifies several push and pull factors influencing this choice. At the macro level, two main push factors—such as the competitive educational environment in China—encourage these students to seek education abroad, while micro-level push factors include personal preferences and educational aspirations (Jing et al., 2021). Conversely, Canada's appeal as a destination

stems from five macro-level pull factors, including its high-quality education system, multicultural environment, and safe living conditions, along with two micro-level factors related to family influence and the potential for future educational opportunities (Jing et al., 2021). The study contributes to the literature by differentiating the motivations for pursuing secondary versus higher education abroad, offering insights into the unique considerations Chinese students and families weigh when choosing Canada for earlier stages of education. Though Jing et al. (2021) may have emphasized the role of host country policies in shaping post-study migration intentions, aligning with King and Sondhi (2018)'s analysis of "education-migration" as a structured pathway driven by governmental policy frameworks. Both studies agreed that supportive immigration policies like post-study work permits, direct pathways to permanent residency are critical pull factors that influence students' decisions to remain in the host country. While alignment exists in recognizing the significance of policies and economic opportunities between both studies, Jing et al. (2021) focused on a specific cultural group examining how familial expectations and cultural ties influence migration intentions, King and Sondhi (2018) adopted a more generalized perspective, analyzing broader patterns across multiple demographic groups.

The experiences of UK and Indian students studying abroad demonstrate that international education decisions are shaped by financial, academic, and policy factors. For students with families, these considerations are even more complex. Policymakers and institutions should develop targeted strategies to ensure that international students do not have to choose between education and family stability.

King and Sondhi (2018) argued that education-migration pathways are fundamentally shaped by host countries' strategic policies aimed at retaining skilled workers. Jing et al. (2021) added depth to this by highlighting how these pathways intersect with individual aspirations and familial influences, particularly in collectivist cultures. King and Sondhi (2018) emphasized the economic rationale of migration policies, suggesting a primarily utilitarian framework. In contrast, Jing et al. (2021) proposed a more nuanced view, incorporating emotional and relational factors that significantly influence migration decisions.

Adeyanju and Olatunji (2022) in their study found that Canada's immigration policies attract young, skilled individuals by offering a student visa pathway to permanent residency, which aligns with the neoliberal agenda of prioritizing "self-made" immigrants who contribute economically to the host country. Middle and upper-class Nigerian families send their children to Canadian universities for better educational opportunities, employment prospects during and after studies, and eventual Canadian permanent residence. Poor conditions in Nigeria's education system, combined with high unemployment, serve as push factors. Migration is seen as beneficial for both Canada and Nigerian families. Canada gains through high tuition fees from international students, while Nigerian students and their families secure opportunities for quality education and potential permanent residency. In their study, Adeyanju and Olatunji addressed the potential brain drain from Nigeria, where educated individuals remain in Canada after graduation, but suggests there is also a transnational benefit, with students potentially contributing back to Nigeria in the future. It was concluded that migration for higher education is driven by socio-economic factors and facilitated by Canada's accommodating immigration policies Adeyanju & Olatunji (2022).

Adeyanju and Olatunji (2022) explored themes surrounding international student migration pathways, emphasizing the interplay between the push and pull factors. The study provides a foundation for analyzing migration as a decision driven by both structural conditions and individual agency. It was argued that migration decisions are not merely the result of home-country inadequacies but are deeply embedded in perceptions of opportunity abroad. They highlight a dynamic interplay where students oscillate between staying abroad and returning home based on shifting economic and social incentives. This aligns with Jing et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of cultural and familial expectations in mediating students' migration intentions. However, where Adeyanju and Olatunji foregrounded economic pragmatism, Jing et al. highlighted emotional and social factors, creating tension in understanding what motivates migration. Adeyanju and Olatunji pointed to the decisive influence of immigration policies, such as post-study work visas, in attracting and retaining international students. This resonates with King and Sondhi (2018), who argued that education-migration pathways are a deliberate strategy for host countries to address labor shortages.

Adeyanju and Olatunji critiqued immigration policies which created unequal access among international students, especially those from the Global South. This tension challenges King and Sondhi's more optimistic framing of such pathways as universally beneficial. While Adeyanju and Olatunji emphasized the structural conditions driving migration, Jing et al. (2021) focused the agency of individual students in navigating these pathways. The tension lies in whether migration is primarily shaped by external forces or by personal decisions influenced by cultural and familial contexts. The studies collectively suggested that international student migration is a complex interplay of structural policies, economic considerations, and individual aspirations.

Apart from other external factors that motivate students' intention to study abroad, self-motivation is a major factor. An essential component in determining the adjustment of international college students studying abroad is their motivation, according to a study by Chirkov et al. (2007). The study further posited that the degree of autonomous motivation among international students significantly predicts various adjustment outcomes across diverse samples and countries of residence. Chirkov et al. in contrast with the previous studies on the push and pull factors, further noted that students who perceive their decision to study abroad as self-initiated and supported are likely to experience greater happiness, reduced distress, and enhanced success in adapting to a new country, in contrast to those who feel coerced by external pressures or circumstances.

Literature on immigration policies and the intersection with international students are majorly explored by various studies, sadly, there is a dearth of literature on the intersection with international students with families. This is a major gap that this study aims to address.

2.3. Canadian Immigration Policy Landscape

Adler (2023) defined policy as an embodiment of systematic decision-making designed to enhance social outcomes grounded in ethical and economic principles. Policy is a deliberate system of guidelines to guide decisions and achieve outcomes. Canadian immigration policies have been undergoing a series of changes that have impacted the international university students significantly. Many of these policies have serious implications for international graduate students with families often determining factors such as the duration of their stay, their children's access to schools, eligibility for permanent residency, and opportunities for employment (for both partner and the student). International university students are regarded as the best immigrants

because they boost the nation's economy (Altbach, 2004). This category of students is faced with demanding situations because of these reforms, and they are mostly hindered to settling in and eventual change in status as permanent residence in Canada. The tricky situations are mostly evident in their standards of living, particularly the ones that have their families with them. International students contribute significantly to the economy of their host countries in paying taxes, rent accommodations, filling labour market shortages, purchasing goods and services, and contribute to the growth of local industries.

International students' perceptions regarding these policies can be influenced by factors such as country of origin, field of study, and personal circumstances. With many international students aspiring to stay in Canada after finishing their studies, clear pathways to residency and favorable immigration policies are important to support and attract them. Findings from a study by Lu et al. (2009) suggested that international students are more likely to view Canada positively if they perceive viable pathways to permanent residency. The study focuses on the factors influencing the migration intentions of Chinese undergraduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. It examines their transition from temporary residency as international students transit to potential permanent residency in Canada, in the context of Canadian immigration policies and their impact. At the time of the study, Lu et al. (2009) found that the Canadian Experience Class and the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) significantly motivated students toward permanent residency by easing work and immigration pathways. There was the assured extension of post-graduation work permits (up to three years) which provided graduates more time to gain Canadian work experience and apply for residency. However, these have changed over the recent years with no assurance for international students in achieving their dreams of becoming permanent residents in Canada.

The inability to stay up to date on policy changes, systemic barriers within Canada's immigration pathways, lack of access to immigration resources on campus, and shifting immigration policies were among the challenges mentioned by international students to becoming citizens and permanent residents of Canadian universities and the federal government both actively seek to internationalize Canadian higher education by promoting it to international students through policy documents. However, they are not given equal access to Canada's permanent residency and labor market due to the country's citizenship and immigration regulations. They were restricted in access to certain resources that foster their productivity (Canadian Broadcasting News, 2023). International students who study for a year or less than a year program get a post graduate work permit of one year, this is undoubtedly not a sufficient time for permanent residency processing.

2.4. Impact of Immigration Policies on Student Experience

Aligning with the study of Lu et al. (2019) who posited that international students might consider staying in Canada if they perceive viable pathways to permanent residency, Wand and Liu (2024) opined that recruitment and retention of international students in Canada are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including government policies, institutional support and, socio-economic conditions. Cost of living, availability of part-time job opportunities, and quality of life are also significant socio-economic factors influencing international student recruitment and retention. Research by Anderson (2020) highlights the positive correlation between economic factors and international student retention. Canada's reputation for high-quality education, multicultural environment, safety, and natural beauty contributes to its attractiveness as a study destination. Additionally, Canada's opportunities for employment during

and after studies, attract international students. Netierman (2022) agreeing with Anderson (2020) maintained that these factors play a crucial role in attracting and retaining international students in Canada.

Addressing financial considerations requires a multi-faceted approach (Anderson, 2020). One of the primary financial factors influencing international students' decisions is the cost of tuition fees and the overall cost of living in Canada (Ranasinghe, 2023). The effect is seen more with students with families. According to Anderson (2020), international students contributed over \$21 billion (about \$65 per person in the US) to the Canadian economy in 2018, with a sizable portion coming from tuition fees. When these fees are paid, the international students with families still cope with uncertainties of what becomes of them and their families after their studies. Observably, many international students rely on part-time work to supplement their income and cover living expenses while studying in Canada, and the cost and bills get more expensive when families are involved. The availability of part-time work opportunities, as well as regulations surrounding international students' ability to work during their studies, can influence their decision to choose Canada as a study destination. Ranasinghe (2023) posited that the opportunity to work part-time is a significant factor for international students when considering where to study.

International students in Canada are typically required to have health insurance coverage, either through a provincial health plan or a private insurance provider. Health insurance premiums and healthcare costs can add to the financial burden for international students. Ensuring access to affordable healthcare services is important for their overall well-being and financial stability. Students with families under this health insurance coverage pay for all the dependents and this adds more to the financial commitments of the students.

2.5. Mental Health and Emotional Well-being of International Students

Mental well-being is a broad concept that encompasses an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It involves the ability to manage stress, work productively, maintain fulfilling relationships, and make meaningful contributions to one's community (Bai, 2016). In the context of international graduate students, mental well-being is particularly critical due to the unique stressors they face, including academic pressure, financial pressure, unrealistic future, cultural adjustment, and social isolation. International students often experience higher levels of stress and anxiety due to the challenges of adapting to a new cultural and educational environment (Hyun, et al., 2007). The mental well-being of these students is closely tied to their sense of belonging and the support they receive from their institutions. When students feel that they are part of a supportive community and that their institution values their well-being, they are more likely to experience positive mental health outcomes (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2011).

The mental well-being of students is deeply influenced by their sense of belonging and the inclusivity of their environment. When students experience belonging and are supported by inclusive policies, they are more resilient to stress and better equipped to handle the challenges of graduate education (Bai, 2016). Conversely, a lack of belonging and inadequate inclusivity can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and isolation, negatively impacting mental health (Hyun et al., 2007). Therefore, understanding and addressing the nexus of these elements is essential for promoting the holistic success and well-being of international graduate students.

Coupled with the financial strain that the immigration policies have is also the international students' sense of belonging and integration on university campuses in Canada. This is evident in barriers to social and cultural integration, as well as strategies and initiatives aimed

at fostering a more inclusive environment for international students. This does not only affect the students but their families that relocate with them. Marginson (2010) opined that international students often experience a period of cultural adjustment when they first arrive in Canada. Integrating into a new system is important for most of the students and their families. Factors such as language barriers, differences in social norms, and homesickness can contribute to feelings of isolation and hinder their sense of belonging. Cultural adjustment is a significant challenge for international students, affecting their well-being and that of their families' integration into Canadian society.

Building social support networks is essential for international students to foster a sense of belonging and integration. This includes forming connections with peers, faculty, and staff within the educational institution, and engaging with the local community. Xie, & Chao. (2022) suggested that social support networks play a crucial role in mitigating feelings of loneliness and enhancing the overall well-being of international students. Exposure to diverse perspectives and cultures can foster a sense of community and belonging among international students, unfortunately, these are not accessed. Xie and Chao (2022) emphasized the importance of creating inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and promote cross-cultural understanding. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, international students may still face discrimination or stereotyping based on their nationality, ethnicity, or language proficiency. Experiences of discrimination can undermine their sense of belonging and hinder their integration into Canadian society. Addressing issues of prejudice and promoting cultural competence are essential for creating welcoming environments for all students.

Immigration policies also affect international postgraduate students' access to employment opportunities and their career development prospects in Canada (Anderson, 2020;

Xie and Chao, 2022). While international students in Canada are exposed to numerous employment opportunities and career development resources, several negative impacts can affect their job prospects and career advancement (McLachlan & Justice 2009). Addressing these negative impacts requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and community organizations. Marginson, (2010) suggested strategies, which may include improving pathways to work authorization, enhancing recognition of foreign credentials, providing language and communication support, combating employment discrimination, expanding networking opportunities, and promoting initiatives to address underemployment and skills mismatch among international graduates.

Despite the available routes to getting post-graduation work permits (PGWP), some international students may face challenges related to work authorization restrictions. Certain industries or positions may require Canadian citizenship or permanent residency, limiting the employment options for international graduates. This can hinder their ability to secure meaningful employment in their field of study (Marginson, 2010). International students often encounter difficulties in having their foreign credentials recognized in Canada. Differences in educational standards and professional requirements may result in employers undervaluing or overlooking international qualifications. Research by McLachlan and Justice 2009 suggests that lack of recognition of foreign credentials can hinder international students' career advancement and professional integration.

According to Marginson, 2010, language proficiency and communication skills are essential for success in the Canadian job market. International students whose first language is not English or French may face challenges in effectively communicating with employers, colleagues, and clients. Language barriers can impact their ability to secure employment, build

professional relationships, and advance in their careers. Despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity, international students may still encounter employment discrimination or bias based on their nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background. McLachlan and Justice 2009 highlighted the challenges faced by international graduates in navigating workplace discrimination and stereotypes, which can impede their career advancement opportunities.

Networking plays a crucial role in career development, yet international students may face barriers in accessing professional networks and industry connections. Limited familiarity with Canadian workplace culture, social norms, and professional associations can hinder their ability to build meaningful professional relationships and secure job opportunities through networking (Xie & Chao, 2022). Many international graduates experience underemployment or skills mismatch, where their qualifications exceed the requirements of the positions they can secure. This can result in frustration, lower job satisfaction, and slower career progression. Underemployment also contributes to brain waste, where skilled individuals are not fully utilizing their talents and expertise (Anderson, 2020).

In a review of literature by El Masri, and Khan (2022), it was emphasized that there is need for institutional support services in assisting international postgraduate students navigate Canada's immigration policies and regulations. The best practices for providing information, guidance, and advocacy to help students address immigration-related challenges and concerns are mostly through student support services. Most students are in limbo and agony with policies that are not favourable and they are unable to access various support services and programs designed to assist international students in their integration process. These may include orientation sessions, cultural integration workshops, peer mentoring programs, and counseling services. According to El Masri, and Kha, access to institutional support services positively

influences international students' sense of belonging and academic success. While student support services are designed to assist international students in various aspects of their academic and personal lives, there can be negative impacts from these services.

Student support services may suffer from understaffing and resource constraints, leading to limited availability of counselors, advisors, and other support staff. High student-to-counselor ratios can result in inadequate support and longer wait times for appointments, diminishing the effectiveness of these services (Marginson 2010). Student support services may struggle to reach and engage international students effectively. Lack of targeted outreach efforts or culturally sensitive programming can result in low awareness or utilization of available services among international student populations. This can exacerbate feelings of isolation or alienation among international students (El Masri, & Kha). Student support services may not always address the diverse needs and experiences of international students comprehensively. Services primarily focused on academic advising or career counseling may overlook other important aspects of international students' well-being, such as cultural adjustment, social integration, or immigration-related concerns. International students may encounter language and cultural barriers when accessing support services (Scott et al., 2015).

Miscommunication or misunderstandings due to language differences can hinder the effectiveness of counseling sessions or workshops. Cultural differences in help-seeking behavior or perceptions of mental health may also impact international students' willingness to utilize support services (Scott et al., 2015). Stigma surrounding mental health issues or personal challenges may deter international students from seeking support services. Fear of judgment, confidentiality breaches, or negative consequences may prevent students from disclosing their concerns or seeking help when needed. This can lead to untreated mental health issues and

exacerbate students' struggles (Scott et al., 2015). International students may encounter challenges in navigating complex administrative and bureaucratic systems when seeking support services. Differences in education systems, visa regulations, and healthcare policies can add layers of complexity to accessing assistance. Scott posited that lack of guidance or advocacy in navigating these systems can create additional stress and barriers for international students.

2.6. IRCC's Enrollment Cap vs. Addressing Existing Challenges for International Students

Canada has long positioned itself as a top destination for international students, with policies aimed at attracting talent and fostering diversity in higher education. However, the 2024 IRCC immigration reforms reflect a shift away from student inclusion toward restrictive measures that fail to address the real challenges faced by international students and their families. Instead of implementing solutions to improve student support systems, work policies, visa processing, and pathways to permanent residency, IRCC placed a cap on international student enrollment, framing it to ensure "sustainability" in the system (Tahir, 2024).

In 2024, the IRCC introduced a cap on study permit applications, citing concerns about rising housing costs, labor market integration, and strain on public resources. While the government justified the cap to protect infrastructure and ensure quality education, it overlooked the real, unresolved issues affecting international students. (Merriam, 2024). This includes long visa processing delays that leave students and families in limbo, unstable work-hour regulations that create financial uncertainty, lack of institutional support for students with dependents, restricted pathways to post-graduate work and permanent residency.

Instead of addressing these systemic problems, the cap reduces the number of students coming to Canada but does not improve the experience of those already here. IRCC claims the

cap will help control housing shortages, yet many international students already face housing insecurity due to financial constraints and limited employment opportunities. According to Carvalho and Vilaça, (2024), the cap does not prevent exploitative landlord practices or rising tuition fees, which remain significant burdens on students. Limiting student numbers does not fix delays in visa renewals, which continue to affect students and their families.

Rather than introducing meaningful reforms that support international students, the policy decisions focus on limiting access rather than improving conditions (Abass & Halidu, 2024). IRCC initially allowed unlimited off-campus work hours, but in 2024, this was changed multiple times, creating confusion among students. The decision to set work-hour limits at 24 hours per week does not account for the rising cost of living and tuition hikes, forcing many students to seek under-the-table jobs to survive. International students were expected to prove financial stability before arrival, but this expectation ignores inflation, economic shifts, and unexpected costs, leaving many in financial distress.

Additionally, study permit renewals and family visa extensions take far longer than the estimated processing time (Merriam, 2024). Students who experience delays lose access to healthcare (MSP), work permits, and legal status, affecting their academic progress and mental well-being. Families of students face employment restrictions, limiting financial independence and forcing students to bear full economic responsibility. A policy that claims to protect resources should focus on making visa processing more efficient instead of keeping families in bureaucratic uncertainty.

Chapter Three

3.1. Methodology

Many early career scholars in education are often faced with the difficulty in using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to tackle the methodology in addressing my Master of Education exit option-project. I was also faced with a similar challenge. Similarly, in this project, initially, my study focused on social media narratives of international postgraduate students. However, this project has evolved to examine Canada's recent immigration policy reforms, specifically the IRCC's 2024 policy on strengthening temporary residence programs. Canada's 2024 immigration policy reforms have introduced significant changes affecting international students, particularly those pursuing postgraduate studies with families. These policies, framed around economic sustainability and system integrity, raise critical concerns about how international students are positioned within Canada's broader immigration and educational landscape. This project employs CDA to examine the language, narratives, and ideologies embedded within these policies. By analyzing policy documents, institutional responses, and public discourse, it aims to uncover who is included or excluded in these policies, what justifications are used, and how universities respond to these changes.

The review of literature in Chapter Two highlights the significant role that international students play in ensuring the financial stability of Canadian institutions. However, the IRCC's 2024 immigration policy changes, particularly the cap on study permit applications, have been identified as a dominant factor contributing to an unprecedented decline in international enrollments. As a result, many institutions have shifted their focus toward mitigating the financial and structural challenges brought about by these policy shifts (Retrenchment Watch

Newsletter, 2024). Given the profound impact of these policies, it is crucial to examine how they shape public narratives, institutional responses, and student experiences. This research employs CDA to analyze the experiences of international postgraduate students with families in Western Canada, exploring how immigration policies influence their lived realities and shape institutional strategies in response to enrollment declines. The following research questions guide this study, focusing on policy framing, institutional adaptation, and alternative care-based approaches to immigration reform.

1. How do Canada's 2024 immigration policies impact international students with families?
2. What narratives and ideologies about international students are reinforced through policy language and discourse?
3. Whose interests and perspectives are prioritized or marginalized in these immigration policy reforms? How do I situate myself in inclusion or marginalization?
4. How do universities, particularly Thompson Rivers University (TRU), respond to and challenge these policy changes?
5. How could these policies be reframed using a care-based approach that prioritizes student well-being and inclusion?

Behind this background, through CDA, this study analyzed policy documents and institutional statements to uncover the ideological underpinnings, power dynamics, and institutional positioning embedded within immigration discourse. This approach offered insights into how Canada's policies shape the lived experiences of international students, particularly those with families, and how universities react to these changes. Ultimately, the project contributed to a deeper understanding of the real-world impact of immigration policies on

international postgraduate students and advocated for more inclusive policy frameworks using Nel Noddings framework of care. For convenience, I used my experience as an international student from the campus of Thompson Rivers University representing a sample in the population of international postgraduate students. I identify as an international student with family and my story also contributed to the analysis of this discussion.

The review of literature in the chapter two of this project highlights the significant role of international students in the financial stability of Canadian institutions. The IRCC's 2024 immigration policy changes, particularly the cap on study permit applications, were framed as the central factor causing an unprecedented decline in international enrollments. This underpins why most institutions are channeling their actions to combat the effect that the decline would have on them (Retrenchment Watch Newsletter, 2024).

Given the profound impact of these policies, it is crucial to examine how they shape public narratives, institutional responses, and student experiences. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for understanding how language constructs power relations, ideologies, and institutional adaptations in policy documents (Manning-Lewis, 2022). This research employs CDA to analyze the experiences of international postgraduate students with families in Western Canada, exploring how immigration policies influence their lived realities and shape institutional strategies in response to enrollment declines because of the policy statements.

3.2. Theory on the context

Applying CDA to international students with families allowed me to explore how discourses shape policies, public perceptions, and institutional responses to student migration.

Several recent studies utilized CDA in migration policies, international education, and family inclusion in host countries. For instance, Perez (2024) investigates how international students, and their families are represented in the National Policy on Foreign Students. Using CDA, the study identifies dominant narratives about transnational students and their pathways to mobility. Flynn (2024) on the other hand applied critical discourse analysis and trans-language studies to examine migration politics and intergenerational language use among immigrant families. The study reveals how language hierarchies are embedded in migration discourses. Manning-Lewis (2022) presented CDA as an effective tool for dissecting social and political texts that shape public consciousness. She used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in helping student researchers critically examine textual, social, and cultural discourses in education. Lewis's work identified how CDA can be used to challenge, redefine, and delegitimize dominant narratives that misrepresent historical, social, and educational realities. Additionally, it underscores the need for greater oversight of educational resources and practices, which are often shaped by dominant discourses. By critically examining discourse, I was exposed to structural inequalities and advocate for more inclusive narratives in media, policy, and academia that would support international students with families.

3.3. Research Design

This project focused on two key sources of discourse -policy statements from the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizen Canada (IRCC) and institutional responses and mitigation strategies. These texts defined policy changes, regulatory measures, and justifications for the shift in immigration rules for international students. They reflect governmental perspectives on student migration, labor market needs, and economic sustainability. Also included in this

analysis were statements from universities and colleges reacting to IRCC's policies. Institutional responses revealed how post-secondary institutions adapt to policy changes, mitigate financial challenges, and advocate for international students to suit their mandates.

Policy statements (IRCC documents) offered insights into how the government justifies new immigration policies, particularly caps on study permits and changes to work eligibility. By analyzing policy language, this study assessed the extent to which policies position international students within Canada's economic and labor market framework. This has a major effect on international students with families as most of these families are perceived as having strains on the Canada's available resources. On the other hand, institutional mitigation responses (university statements) counterbalanced government discourse by providing insights into how universities and colleges interpret, implement, or challenge these policies. Institutional responses highlighted their financial vulnerabilities stemming from declining international enrollments, adaptation strategies, such as tuition adjustments, enrollment shifts, and student support initiatives and, the role of universities as intermediaries between international students and government regulations. This discourse provided a holistic view of the impact of immigration reforms on international students and Canadian higher education. While institutions have actively responded to these changes, their mitigation efforts have primarily focused on financial sustainability and enrollment recovery, with little to no consideration for the unique challenges faced by international students with families.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

The project used document analysis as the primary data collection method. Data was collected from the official government policy statements from IRCC website and press releases

like the ministerial announcement. Data was also gathered from university and college public responses to the new immigration policies. This featured reports from academic and policy organizations tracking the impact of these changes on international student enrollment and institutional funding. These documents were thereafter systematically analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and ideological perspectives on immigration policy and institutional adaptation.

3.5. Data Collection Strategy

The IRCC document was sourced from its website highlighting the official ministerial announcement on study permit regulations (Government of Canada, 2024). The policy document showcased its importance by supporting it with legal frameworks outlining reason behind its restrictions on dependents and work permits. The essence of this analysis was to examine how policy language justifies study permit caps and work eligibility changes. This is also hinged on analyzing how policies position international students within Canada's labor and economic framework.

The primary sources for institutional responses and mitigation strategies are public statements, press releases, and reports from universities and colleges (e.g., Thompson Rivers University (TRU)). Another document that was analyzed was the Recovery Project initiative according to the Retrenchment Watch Newsletter (2024) which focused on financial uncertainty in Canadian higher education with emphasis on tracking budget deficits, program suspensions, and staff layoffs due to declining international enrollments in most institutions. The analysis of this set of documents was done to assess how institutions interpret, implement, or challenge government policies and further investigate institutional adaptations, such as tuition adjustments and student support programs.

3.6. Data Extraction & Ethical Considerations

Data from these documents were extracted using manual document analysis for systematic reviewing and coding government and institutional statements. Textual and thematic coding were used for identifying repeated phrases, justifications, and ideological framings in policy texts. A comparative analysis was also employed to examine policy discourse vs. institutional discourse to understand their alignment or divergence.

There were ethical considerations that ensured all policy documents and institutional responses are cited accurately. I also ensured that there was no misrepresentation of data, and I avoided selective interpretation of discourse to maintain objectivity. If additional survey or interview data are included, informed consent would be obtained from international students and institutional representatives.

3.7. Data Analysis Method

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach for this project identified language choices in IRCC and institutional documents. It analyzed how policy discourses were circulated and reinforced, examining broader ideological and economic justifications for immigration reforms. The discourse analysis further investigates power relations in policy discourse identifying exclusionary vs. inclusionary narratives regarding international students. In the earlier chapter, there was a session that addressed the push and pull factors that contributed to international students' interest in studying abroad, particularly Canada. This analysis compared historical justifications for student visa restrictions.

3.8. Thematic Coding Approach

To critically analyze Canada’s 2024 immigration policy reforms and their impact on international students and their families, this project employed a thematic coding framework rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The framework identified key discursive patterns in policy documents and institutional responses, revealing the underlying ideologies, justifications, and power structures shaping immigration discourse. The coding categories below classified recurring themes in policy language, including economic framing, exclusionary narratives, burden discourse, institutional adjustments, and advocacy efforts. By systematically coding policy statements, this project uncovered how immigration policies position international students and their families, justified regulatory changes, and elicited responses from higher education institutions. Table 1 outlines the core thematic codes, their definitions, and representative policy statements.

Table 1: Coding Framework & Categories

Code	Theme	Example Policy Statement
ECON	Economic Framing	"Ensuring financial sustainability in study permit allocations."
EXCL	Exclusionary Language	"Restricting dependent visas to reduce system strain."
BURDEN	Burden Discourse	"Dependents may overutilize public resources."
INSTADJ	Institutional Adjustments	"Universities seek alternative revenue sources."
ADVOC	Advocacy and Resistance	"Calls for policy reconsideration to protect international education."

3.9. Analyzing emerging themes and patterns

The emerging themes and patterns are discussed in this section. This is highlighted under the headings provided in the themes in Table 1. I extracted and coded key sections from Canada's 2024 immigration policy reforms and institutional responses, particularly from Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the Retrenchment Watch Newsletter.

The recent changes to Canada's immigration policies, particularly the cap on international study permits, have sparked significant discussion regarding their impact on international students and post-secondary institutions. These policy adjustments are framed around economic sustainability and resource management, yet they also introduce barriers that reshape the landscape of international education in Canada. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this project explored the dominant narratives embedded within the 2024 IRCC policy framework and its institutional responses. The analysis uncovered key themes, including economic framing, exclusionary language, burden discourse, institutional adaptation, and advocacy efforts. By critically examining how policies position international students within Canada's labor and economic framework, this project deconstructed the ideological underpinnings influencing policy decisions and their broader socio-political implications. Through this approach, I assessed the restrictive nature of current immigration policies, particularly regarding students with families, and how universities respond to mitigate financial and enrollment challenges. This project offered insights into more inclusive policy alternatives that align with principles of equity and accessibility in global education. [08]

3.9.1 Themes from IRCC statements

3.9.1.1. Thematic Code: Economic Framing (ECON)

IRCC Statement: "The IRCC's 2024 immigration policy changes, particularly the cap on study permit applications, are framed as the central factor causing an unprecedented decline in international enrollments."

CDA Interpretation: This policy language suggests that immigration caps are framed as a necessary measure to regulate international enrollments. The emphasis on financial sustainability over educational accessibility implies that student migration is being controlled primarily for economic balance, rather than to foster diversity and academic growth.

3.9.1.2. Thematic Code: Exclusionary Language and Student Selection (EXCL)

IRCC Statement: "By analyzing policy language, this project will assess the extent to which policies position international students within Canada's economic and labor market framework."

CDA Interpretation: This statement positions international students not as academic participants but as economic actors within Canada's labor market. The policy discourse subtly frames students based on their economic contributions rather than their educational or social roles, reinforcing the idea that international students are primarily valued for their workforce potential rather than their intellectual contributions.

3.9.1.3 Thematic Code: Burden Discourse and Restrictions on Family Sponsorship (BURDEN)

IRCC Statement: "This policy affects the enrollment of international students to many Canadian post-secondary institutions as many intending students were discouraged and cut off by other policy statements that are disturbing."

CDA Interpretation: The phrase "discouraged and cut off" suggests that students with families face direct barriers to enrollment, reinforcing the idea that dependents are not welcome within Canada's student immigration framework. This aligns with government justifications that student dependents could overstrain public resources such as healthcare and housing, further marginalizing international students with families.

3.9.2. Themes from Institutional Responses (Thompson Rivers University and Retrenchment Watch Newsletter)

3.9.2.1. Thematic Code: Institutional Adaptation and Budget Challenges (INSTADJ)

Institutional Statement (Retrenchment Watch Newsletter, 2024): "The Retrenchment Watch Newsletter (2024) provides a comprehensive overview of how Canadian post-secondary institutions are responding to financial challenges aggravated by declining international student enrollments."

CDA Interpretation: This statement reflects how universities are being forced to adjust their operations due to the financial impact of immigration caps. As a result, institutions must explore new funding sources, tuition hikes, or even faculty and staff layoffs, demonstrating that policy changes are not only affecting students but also destabilizing higher education institutions.

3.9.2.2. Thematic Code: Advocacy & Resistance (ADVOC)

Institutional Statement: "Institutional responses reveal how post-secondary institutions adapt to policy changes, mitigate financial challenges, and advocate for international students to suit their mandates."

CDA Interpretation: Universities position their responses as protective measures for international students, underscoring an ideological divide between government policy and

institutional concerns. While immigration policies emphasize financial self-sufficiency, universities argue for the value of international students as integral members of academic communities, advocating for policies that prioritize educational inclusivity over economic restriction.

3.10. Reframing Canada's 2024 Immigration Policy Using Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings (1984, 2013) developed the framework that focused on the ethics of care which emphasizes relational, empathetic, and context-sensitive approaches to decision-making. In contrast to policies driven by economic and exclusionary language, a care-centered immigration policy would prioritize empathy and well-being of international students and their families. It would further ensure mutual responsibility between the host country and students and recognize the students as whole individuals, not just economic contributors. The current IRCC 2024 policy emphasized economic sustainability, restrictions, and burden discourse. A policy based on Noddings' framework would center care, inclusion, and shared responsibility, balancing Canada's economic needs with the well-being of international students.

One of the statements in current policy (IRCC 2024) specified that *"to maintain fairness and sustainability in our immigration system, study permit applications will be capped, and restrictions on family sponsorship will ensure responsible resource allocation."* Using CDA and Noddings' perspective, the phrase "fairness and sustainability" masks an exclusionary logic, positioning international students as potential burdens rather than contributors. Also, the "restrictions on family sponsorship" disregards the social and emotional realities of student migration. This further reiterates that economic framing dominates, with no recognition of student well-being. For this excerpt, the rewritten policy statement using ethics of care should

rather read *"Canada values the contributions of international students and their families. As we ensure a balanced approach to student immigration, we commit to policies that support the holistic well-being of students while maintaining a fair and sustainable system. Family support structures will be integrated into the study permit process, acknowledging the importance of stability and care for students' success."* The improvement using Noddings' framework recognizes international students as people, not just labor-market contributors. It makes shifts from exclusion to support, framing policies as mutual responsibility and maintains fairness and sustainability while adding care-centered language.

Additionally, another current policy excerpt (IRCC 2024) stated that *"dependents of international students may place additional strain on housing and healthcare systems, requiring new measures to ensure the integrity of public resources."* With the lens of CDA and Nodding ethics of care, the phrase "place additional strain" presents dependents as a liability rather than valued family members. There was no consideration for well-being, mental health, or family stability. The policy rather focused on "ensuring the integrity of public resources" prioritizes state control over student welfare. Rewriting the policy statement should read that *"recognizing the interconnected well-being of international students and their families, Canada is committed to ensuring stable housing and healthcare access. Policies will provide guidance on integrating dependents into local support systems, ensuring that students can thrive academically and personally while contributing to our communities. To promote family stability and reduce financial strain on students, spouses of international students will be eligible for work permits, allowing them to contribute economically while integrating into Canadian society. Institutions will collaborate with local businesses to offer employment opportunities tailored for student families."* The rewritten statements framed dependents as part of the student's success, not a

burden, this was emphasizing student-family well-being, not just policy control. It also retained the fact that the policy centers support and shared responsibility.

Furthermore, the University responses to IRCC statements also lacked elements of care in some ways. The response stated that “*Universities will explore alternative revenue sources to adjust to declining international student enrollments caused by recent immigration policies.*” The focus was on “alternative revenue sources” which further reinforced the marketization of education. There was no mention of institutional responsibility for student care and inclusion. The responses confirmed that students are economic figures rather than human beings in need of support. I would also suggest that for inclusivity and care of the students, the statement should have stated that “*as institutions adjust to immigration policy changes, universities remain committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for international students. We will actively develop financial, social, and academic resources to ensure that all students—regardless of immigration status—are provided with the necessary tools to succeed.*” A statement like this acknowledges that students require more than tuition adjustments—they need holistic support. It removes the economic mindset replacing it with care-based institutional responsibility. This centers student well-being while acknowledging policy realities.

3.11. Autoethnographic Reflection: Navigating Canada’s Immigration Policies as an International Student with a Family

Making the decision to pursue postgraduate education in Canada was more than an academic ambition; it was a profound step toward career growth and a better future. However, transitioning to life as an international student with a family came with unexpected obstacles, particularly due to Canada’s evolving immigration policies. While the country is known for its

emphasis on education and diversity, policy shifts in recent years—such as the 2024 study permit cap and changes to work-hour regulations—have introduced new challenges that have significantly shaped my experience. The official policy discourse suggests that reducing student numbers will ensure that "Canada remains a desirable destination for top talent." However, current international students are excluded from decision-making processes, despite being the ones facing these challenges firsthand. The economic contribution of international students (tuition, workforce participation, research output) is not acknowledged in justifications for restrictive policies. I was in the middle of all this. Canada markets itself as a diverse, welcoming study destination, yet its policies send exclusionary messages that contradict this branding. The government encourages students to come under the premise of support and stability, but once they arrive, shifting policies create barriers to success.

3.12. Institutional Mitigation Strategies and the Overlooked Reality of Students with Families

Canada's immigration policies have a direct impact on the financial stability of universities, prompting institutions to develop mitigation strategies in response to declining enrollments (Retrenchment Watch Newsletter, 2024). However, in reviewing institutional responses, I noticed a glaring omission of the lived realities of international students with families which were significantly missing in mitigation plans.

While universities acknowledged the economic consequences of fewer international students, their focus was on institutional survival rather than student well-being. There were no provisions for family support, dependent visa accommodations, or financial assistance for students balancing education with caregiving responsibilities. This lack of consideration

reinforced the notion that international students were primarily valued for their tuition contributions rather than their holistic needs as individuals and families.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I examine how institutional narratives align with or challenge government policies, revealing the gaps in policy discourse that fail to acknowledge the full scope of student experiences. The challenges introduced by these policies were not abstract—they deeply affected my academic journey, financial stability, and family’s well-being. The first major setback for me was in visa processing delays and family uncertainty. With fewer international students enrolling due to recent immigration restrictions, many universities have had to adjust their financial and operational strategies (Retrenchment Watch Newsletter, 2024). While institutional reports highlight concerns about reduced tuition revenue and declining student numbers, they rarely acknowledge the struggles of students with dependents. There has been little effort to develop support structures for those balancing academic commitments with family responsibilities. Instead, the focus remains on economic sustainability rather than student well-being. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research examined the ways institutions frame international students within broader financial and policy narratives, exposing the gaps in institutional and governmental support that leave many students and their families vulnerable.

3.13. Centering Student Families in Immigration Policy Reforms

The current narratives in Canada’s immigration policies and institutional mitigation strategies fail to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by international students with families. While policies emphasize economic sustainability and institutional viability, they

neglect the emotional, financial, and logistical struggles of students balancing academic life with family responsibilities.

Through autoethnography and CDA, this project stresses the urgent need for a visa system that aligns with program lengths to prevent mid-study disruptions. Importantly, there is a need to be consistent with work-hour regulations that reflect economic realities for students. A more inclusive institutional policies that provide practical support for students with families will also be appreciated. These challenges are not only unique to my experience; they represent the broader struggles of international students navigating an uncertain policy landscape. Without urgent reforms, Canada risks deterring the very individuals it seeks to attract—those who contribute not only as students but as future members of society.

Conclusively, rewriting Canada's 2024 policy on strengthening international students' retention and consideration of their families emphasized a more human-centered immigration policy through the lens of Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care shifting the focus from economic exclusion and burden discourse to support, shared responsibility, and student well-being. It balances policy sustainability with relational care. It humanizes international students and their families and promotes shared institutional responsibility instead of just financial adjustments. By balancing economic sustainability with empathy, this policy ensures that international students can thrive academically, socially, and personally, while Canada benefits from their long-term contributions.

Chapter 4

4.0. Summary, Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter synthesizes the major findings from the research project, drawing together key insights into the lived experiences of international postgraduate students in Canada who migrate with their families. It begins with a summary of core themes uncovered through a content discourse analysis, followed by a conclusion that highlights the implications of these findings. The chapter closes with a forward-looking discussion on future directions, shaped not only by the content analysis but also enriched through a panel discussion and roundtable engagement (as part of the project output) that captured diverse perspectives from stakeholders, students, and academic practitioners. The chapter closes the loop on the project by not only synthesizing findings but by ensuring the voices of affected students and stakeholders inform a pathway for collective action. The panel discussion and roundtable engagement served as a powerful reminder that students don't just need to be welcomed, they need to be understood, supported, and empowered.

4.1 Summary

This research project has examined the multifaceted challenges experienced by international postgraduate students in Canada who relocate with their families. The analysis encompassed themes such as housing insecurity, limited access to social support services, financial precarity, visa/work restrictions, and the lack of institutional responsiveness. Using my story as a specimen and representative of international students with families and literature support, it was found that the lived experiences of these students are deeply shaped by the

systemic limitations of immigration policy and the institutional gaps within university support systems.

A recurring theme throughout the project was that academic success for international students is inextricably tied to nonacademic stressors. There was a fragile balance between childcare, academic obligations, and employment limitations. Immigration policies restricting work hours and family sponsorship intensified financial pressures, while institutional supports such as childcare, mental health services, and academic flexibility were often described as inaccessible, inconsistent, or overly bureaucratic.

To further deepen the understanding of these experiences and to shape forward-looking recommendations, a panel discussion and roundtable engagement were conducted. This brought together educators, institutional leaders, and students to reflect on the findings and offer insights into feasible solutions. Their testimonies emphasized the emotional and psychological toll on students, particularly those with families and pointed to the inadequacy of 'one-size-fits-all' immigration and educational policies that fail to address their lived complexity.

4.2 Conclusion

This research reveals the intersectional vulnerabilities international postgraduate students with families face in Canada. Immigration policy shifts, such as restrictions on spousal work permits or child-related provisions, are not isolated legislative changes, they manifest in the day-to-day instability students endure.

The testimonies gathered underscore a system that often treats these students as economic migrants rather than holistic human beings with familial responsibilities. For example, a recurring insight from the discussion was the disconnect between institutional policies and real-

life challenges. One panelist noted how their student had to miss class to secure housing—a necessity that precedes academic engagement, echoing Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The burden of navigating resources often falls on students themselves, compounded by inconsistent support from immigration advisors and a lack of comprehensive institutional coordination. Educators highlighted how they are informally stepping in to fill the void, supporting housing searches, guiding immigration queries, and advocating for classroom flexibility.

Despite these challenges, student resilience is evident. Many adopt creative coping strategies, rely on informal networks, and engage with community-based organizations such as Kids Immigrant Services (KIS). Yet, systemic change is imperative. Personal efforts cannot substitute for policy interventions and institutional reform.

4.3 Future Directions

Building on the insights from this research and the rich panel discussion, several actionable directions emerge for future advocacy, policy reform, and institutional programming:

Institutionalized Wraparound Support: Universities should establish resolute support units for international students with families, as mentioned by a panelist. These units should help across housing, immigration, employment rights, mental health, and childcare.

Responsive Immigration Policy Advocacy: There is an urgent need for universities and student unions to engage in collective advocacy aimed at federal immigration policy. This includes calling for more flexible work-hour limits for student parents, spousal work permits, and a simplified path to permanent residency for families.

Real-time Communication on Policy Changes: Institutions must develop efficient channels—email newsletters, app notifications, or mandatory orientations, to communicate rapid

immigration or academic policy updates. As one participant highlighted, 'policy changed three times' and students were left to find out independently.

Integrated Childcare in Academic Spaces: Inspired by practices shared during the roundtable, Canadian universities should model classroom-integrated childcare where feasible. Simple allowances, like permitting children in class or establishing drop-in childcare, can dramatically enhance student success and inclusion.

Learning from Global Best Practices: Comparative insights should be drawn from international models. For instance, some universities abroad provide resource handbooks and curated community directories to every incoming student, a practice that could be adopted locally to reduce the burden on individual navigation.

Faculty Training on Inclusive Pedagogy: Faculty should receive training to better support international student parents, particularly on how to accommodate academic flexibility without compromising standards.

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